For the people who care about community animal control

The Numbers Game
by Jane Hutchison

Ours is a society of numbers: telephone numbers, credit card numbers, Social Security numbers. Numbers identify us and give us status. In such a society, it should come as no surprise that humane societies are also frequently preoccupied with numbers.

We receive many inquiries about our shelter and its operations. The most common questions are "How many animals do you handle each year?" (answer: approximately 40,000 dogs and cats, 1,600 wild animals, plus other miscellaneous animals), and "What is your adoption rate?" (answer: approximately 12 percent).

Only 12 percent? But other humane societies claim to have an adoption rate of 90 percent! How do they do it? Does that mean we aren't as humane as they, or we aren't doing our jobs as well? At first glance (which is all these organizations want us to take) it would appear so. Let's take a closer look at those all-important numbers.

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A humane organization claiming to adopt out 90 percent of all animals brought to it accomplishes this feat in one of three ways. One easy and successful method is to adopt out any animal to anyone who can afford the fee. To encourage adoption of as many animals as possible, such organizations have few (if any) adoption requirements, and the adoption fee is extremely low. While a person's financial status is certainly no indication of a willingness to properly care for a pet, every pet owner must be financially able to support the animal throughout its life. Payment of the adoption fee is only the beginning of what can be an expensive and lengthy responsibility. While this approach certainly keeps the adoption rate high, we question the ultimate fate of those animals so thoughtlessly adopted. Placing an animal in a good, permanent home is difficult even with careful screening of possible adopters. A portion of the animals will be abandoned, mistreated or returned. Even this approach won't attain the 90-percent goal, as there aren't enough homes, good or bad, for every animal.

The second way of reaching an outstanding adoption rate is by dividing all incoming animals into two groups — adoptable and non-adoptable. Those too old, sick or injured or too young or ill-tempered are simply not counted as part of the total. Of those considered adoptable, a certain number will not, for a variety of reasons, be adopted. These will then be declared "not adoptable," and the magic number of 90 percent is reached. Of course, this strange way of counting some animals and disregarding others is never made public. To the uninformed, this humane society seems to be doing an outstanding job. Television news and newspaper articles report glowingly on "the highest adoption rate in the country," a "bright spot" in an otherwise dismal story.

The third method is to simply accept only young, healthy, highly adoptable animals. The problems of those animals turned away are too numerous to be discussed here.

Why is this "numbers game" such an important and sensitive issue? We believe in being honest with the public, our members and contributors. We will not pretend or mislead the public into thinking we will find good homes for all the animals in our care. We do our best, and recent changes in some of our adoption procedures have resulted in significant increases in our adoption rate. But there are not enough good homes for all the animals in our county, and we think it is dishonest to pretend that there are.

Disasters Pinpoint Need For Rescue Plan

Two recent natural disasters re-emphasize the need for humane societies and animal shelters to develop standard plans for emergency rescue, care, and evacuation of animals. Devastating storms, floods, volcanoes and earthquakes as well as fires and oil and chemical spills occur suddenly, often without warning.

According to Ed Ferguson, deputy director of the U.S. Commerce Department's Severe Storm Forecast Center in Kansas City, Mo., 12 tornadoes, accompanied by additional thunderstorms, slammed into Missouri on Dec. 1 and 2. The cause was a slow-moving, eastbound, strong cold front that produced heavy rains and flash floods. Twenty-six people were injured, and many homes were ravaged. Nearby New Baden, Ill., reported three deaths and 60 to 70 injuries. "Storms and flooding are not unheard of in this part of the country," said Ferguson, "but I wouldn't say that we generally expect them to occur."

Rose Gassell of the Humane Society of Missouri (1210 Mackland Ave., St. Louis, MO 63110) agreed. "I don't think anyone realized how rapidly the floodwaters would rise," she said. The group has been struggling around the clock to save cats, dogs, horses and other livestock.

By Dec. 10, Gassell estimated that one-half dozen animals were being rescued every day. "Most people are very concerned about their animals," she said. "Others have volunteered their stables and homes to house livestock and pets. We are boarding as many animals at the society as possible until their owners can re-establish themselves in homes."

Gassell said the society did not use a radio to warn pet owners of the impending disaster, and since the floods struck so quickly, there hasn't been time to discuss future emergency rescue plans. "I'm certain that when things settle down, we will," she said.
A single act of animal cruelty brought a wave of response from the public and public officials, allowing a recently opened New Jersey humane center to educate them about animal abuse.

The Jersey Shore Humane Center (185 Brick Blvd., Bricktown, NJ 08723), which opened last April, received over 300 phone calls after the group rescued a retriever-mix dog that was severely burned -- possibly blinded forever -- when a caustic substance was thrown in its face and it was left at a construction site.

"Radar," as he is now known because of his quick ability to maneuver around objects, is being cared for by two veterinarians and needs at least two additional operations to try to repair the burn damage to his eyes. Already there is a long list of people who would like to adopt him.

"When I heard about him, it was the last straw in a week filled with animal abuse cases," said Center Director Susan Long. "I was sick of it. Ours is a resort town, and we get a lot of animals that are 'beach leftovers.' Radar was hurt at least one week before we rescued him. He was in so much pain, but he would still try to kiss us. Judging by his nice coat, I just don't know how he got to the construction site."

The case prompted a community awareness meeting, attended by close to 100 people and covered by ABC News and Channel 8 in Ocean County. State Sen. John Russo, D-Ocean, sent his representative (Russo telephoned Long twice and offered money to help in the case), and the state SPCA attended. The groups called for stronger animal-cruelty laws in New Jersey.

Although Radar was brought to the meeting, "I did not want to exploit him," said Long, "but I was amazed how many people didn't know that animal abuse occurs regularly."

ABC-TV highlighted Radar's case three nights in a row, and the center received enough donations to offer a $1,000 reward for information about the person(s) who hurt the dog. The group is working with local 4-H groups and an Ocean City, N.J., social services organization on animal-related issues as a result of the case.

"We tried to use Radar's situation to benefit a lot of animals," said Long. "What hurts me most of all are the animals that we know have never had a happy day in their lives; often the kindest thing we can do for them is to euthanize them."

Three HSUS workshops on solving community animal problems are scheduled for spring for humane-society leaders, animal-control agents, municipal officials, educators, and interested HSUS members.

A Tulsa, Okla., workshop will be held on March 18 and 19, sponsored by The HSUS' Gulf States Regional Office, 5333 Everhart Rd., Building A, Suite 209, Corpus Christi, TX 78411; (512)834-3142. Cherry Hill, N.J., is the setting for the April 14-16 workshop. Contact The HSUS, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, 1715 J St., Suite 305, Sacramento, CA 95814; (916)447-3295.

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Euthanasia will never really be 'okay' with us, but when we learn to be objective and deal with it, we will be okay!" said Bill Smith, director of The HSUS Animal Control Academy, during a workshop on stress and euthanasia at the recent HSUS annual conference.

The conference, held Nov. 4-6 in Danvers, Mass., featured workshops and speakers to provide interested HSUS members and shelter and humane-society workers with the latest information about animal welfare and control as well as opportunities to vent their feelings about issues like euthanasia.

Smith was accompanied by Al Jackson, Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology at the University of Alabama and a consultant for the academy, who discussed some ways that stress over euthanasia affects people and what they can do to control it.

Jackson urged the audience to be aware of what happens to them at work and to learn to relax before they begin euthanasia. He explained that stress often takes the form of increased blood pressure just before someone begins to euthanize. Many people don't notice the rise, he said, because the human body tries to adapt to it; however, this chronic intermittent stress eventually takes its toll on the body.

Smith urged co-workers to talk together about their feelings regarding euthanasia. "Making just one person perform euthanasia is dangerous -- everyone needs relief from the job," he said, "and don't let anyone criticize your choice of the animals to be euthanized unless they're ready to take on the job themselves."

Smith also suggested that euthanasia technicians should occasionally sit at the front desk to talk to the public, without expressing anger, in order to help them learn why euthanasia is so necessary. "You can't condemn people for being upset about euthanasia. You can use it as an opportunity to teach them about responsible pet ownership. Say 'I'm glad that you're upset about it because I'm upset too, and this is why...'."

"You can quit," said Smith, "and you can criticize. You can develop ulcers and be depressed. But you will react in some way unless you find a way to deal with euthanizing animals."

Bill Smith: "You will react... unless you can find a way to deal with euthanizing animals."

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We could loudly proclaim a 90-percent success rate -- or even higher -- by manipulating numbers or animals. But this is something we will not do.

Another reason for our concern relates to another set of numbers -- dollars and cents. Individuals and corporations are more likely to support an organization which apparently "saves" a greater number of animal lives. It's nice to assume that once an animal is placed in a new home, it will live happily ever after. The truth, however, is much harder to accept. Our follow-up surveys on some of our adopted pets have shown disappointing and frustrating results, even with our careful screening procedures.

The next time you hear about a humane society claiming to adopt out nearly all of its animals, take a closer look. Ask some questions. Consider the ultimate fate of the animal and the quality of its life.

The author is community relations director for the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley (2530 Lafayette St., Santa Clara, CA 95050).

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6/SHELTER SENSE/FEBRUARY '83
The City of Peoria Division of Animal Control (2214 Darst, Peoria, IL 61607) was well prepared when the same cold front brought storms and flooding to that area.

The shelter is located in a low-lying area, so all the animals were evacuated to an overflow trailer attached to a local veterinary clinic. The staff is housed outside the clinic in a civil-defense trailer. Before the group left the shelter, supplies were removed, office equipment and files were elevated on blocks to protect them from floodwaters, and the shelter was reinforced with sandbags.

"Because of the well-coordinated efforts of my staff, the fire department, civil-defense personnel and other officials, residents who were in real danger were notified to pack up and leave in plenty of time," said Shelter Manager Jennifer Orme. "The media was super and helped a lot. We had the staff to provide assistance, but so far we haven't received any requests to remove animals. We plan to hold animals in the temporary shelter for an extended time to allow pet owners to re-establish themselves."

This is not the first time the Illinois River has flooded Peoria. "Both in 1979," said Orme, "nobody was prepared for such an emergency, and the people who ran the shelter left without safeguarding records and equipment; a lot of it was destroyed. Last spring, the river flooded again, but we were prepared. No less than two months ago, I discussed with a civil-defense director the need for budgeting an emergency contingency plan, because it is very important to me."

Orme admits that there are still some communications problems because there is no direct line from the city office to the civil-defense van or the animal-control trucks. But in this emergency, people can call the shelter number and the call will automatically be transferred to the city office.

**Hurricane Hits Hawaii**

Hurricane Iwa struck several Hawaiian islands in late November, packing 110-mph winds that destroyed homes, businesses, trees and powerlines. At least one person died, and damages of approximately $200 million caused a federal disaster declaration.

Niihau and Kauai islands were hit hardest. (Telephone calls to the Kauai Humane Society were impossible due to downed telephone lines.) According to Alex Wade, director of the Hawaiian Humane Society (2700 Maialae Ave., Honolulu, HI 96826), there haven't been many calls for help because only the western coast of Oahu island was badly damaged. Wade stressed that the society and civil-defense workers worked together to warn people about the approaching hurricane in time to safeguard animals.

"Our men have been out on the roads," said Wade, "and we rescued a stray dog stranded on a pier during the night of the storm. We were lucky. We share a radio frequency with the civil defense, which helped us get word out. I haven't heard a word from Kauai."

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recommends that humane organizations review or develop emergency animal-rescue procedures, keeping these suggestions in mind:

* Sheltered animals may need to be evacuated to safety, so develop a map that clearly marks all animal shelters, pet shops, veterinary hospitals and other areas that house animals.
* Establish a system for rescuing and boarding lost and stranded animals that includes ways to communicate with and reunite pets with owners.
* Decide how sick and injured animals will be handled, and find out in advance where emergency veterinary facilities will likely be located.
* Make advance arrangements to use one or more radio frequencies to warn and direct pet owners, to avoid being bumped by other emergency personnel.
* Contact the state emergency preparedness agency for permission to rescue animals in trouble. If not, you may not be allowed to enter an officially designated disaster area.
* Arrange for emergency gasoline supplies. Most gasoline tanks run on electricity and may be inoperable when power lines are down. (Store gasoline in a safe place, away from the animals.)

The first few hours of a disaster are critical, after which your workers' physical and mental stamina may wane. Develop a cooperative relationship with a nearby humane society in case you must replace your workers.

* Develop public education materials that teach pet owners ways to prepare for emergencies before they strike as well as steps they can take during a disaster. Emphasize the need for proper identification on pets. Urge them to keep on hand a portable cage with a small blanket, a week's ration of food, a can opener, bottled water, ace bandages and other medical supplies. Advise them to check those supplies every six months.

The HSUS can advise local societies and shelters during a disaster. In some cases, if practical and necessary, an HSUS official may travel to a disaster area to assist local humane officials. The HSUS may also try to contact supply distributors (pet food, veterinary supplies, vaccines) to arrange for these to be shipped to the troubled area. Above all, The HSUS urges local humane organizations to develop constructive emergency plans in order to respond quickly and professionally to as many animal emergencies as possible.

**Computer Advice Needed**

The Metropolitan Animal Services Council, serving the Denver, Colorado, metropolitan area, would like advice about computers to help them establish a "lost and found" hook-up between ten area animal shelters. The new system would allow people who have lost or found pets to call any of the ten shelters to obtain current computer information about the animals in their care. In the future, the system could be expanded to include rabies/license information.

Shelters or humane societies with computer hook-up experience are asked to contact Cindy Lesuer, Animal Control, 8101 Ralston Rd., Arvada, CO 80002; (303) 481-3059 or Corinne Clifford, (303) 278-7575.
The first annual Louisiana SPCA dog walk-a-thon, held last fall to boost the group's animal shelter, tallied over $3,400 in pledges and registration fees and attracted over 300 dog walkers over a two-mile course. "The event was a big hit; everybody loved it," said SPCA Director of Education and Public Affairs Marie Gould. She said money is still coming into the SPCA offices (1319 Japonica St., New Orleans, LA 70117) as people make pledges or purchase official 1982 dog walk-a-thon T-shirts. The SPCA purchased the T-shirts, which were handed out to walk-a-thon participants, at a sizeable discount from a local silk-screen printer. Each of the participating dogs received Jerky Treats, donated by the Jerky Treat Company. The Jim Dandy Company donated a leash to each dog, and it gave a year's supply of dog food to the person who raised the most money for the event. The company also matched donations of Jim Dandy dog food brought to the walk-a-thon (over 700 pounds of food was obtained for the shelter animals).

Water stations, located at several points along the course, helped to quench the thirsts of walkers and their pets, as did the cold drinks donated by the Pepsi Company to those who finished the course. The SPCA passed out dog health care kits to the top four fund-raisers that included vitamins, flea dip, shampoo, a dog brush and more.

Local TV and radio stations publicized the event. "Already we are planning next year's walk-a-thon," said Gould, "and we hope to have a New-Orleans-style jazz band lead the way."

WANTED - Experienced humane-society manager, southwest Florida. Responsible for complete shelter operation, staff management, public relations, cruelty investigations. Send resume, references, salary requirements to B. Knedler, 1714 S.E. 11th Ave., Cape Coral, FL 33904; (813) 574-6038.

WANTED - Executive director for small, progressive humane society. Responsible for shelter operation, personnel supervision, membership, investigations, public relations/education, and official liaison. Strong administrative/PR skills needed. Apply: A.M. Edwards, P.O. Box 1342, Manchester Center, VT 05255; (802) 362-1526, evenings.

WANTED - Working manager for small shelter. Administrative ability and knowledge of animal care and control necessary. Living quarters furnished if desired. Salary: $1,200 per month. Send resume to Humane Society of Raleigh County, P.O. Box 115, Beckley, WV 25801.

WANTED - Animal-shelter administrator, Tampa, Fla. Business administrative experience a must. Knowledge of animal handling desirable. Send resume to Animal Shelter, P.O. Box 18942, Tampa, FL 33679.
The 1982 annual HSUS conference in Danvers, Mass., was the perfect setting for HSUS President John Hoyt's announcement that Phyllis Wright, former director of the Department of Animal Sheltering and Control, is now vice president of the new Companion Animals Division.

Many Shelter Sense readers know and love Phyllis through years of working with her for better animal care and control. Newcomers may have already heard that Phyllis' field expertise has provided invaluable service to many through the years.

In 1969, Phyllis became the executive director of The HSUS' former National Humane Education Center in Waterford, Va., once the only national training program for animal-control workers and humane-organization members in the nation. The center contained a model animal shelter, spay/neuter clinic and a multitude of humane education resources.

Today, in her new position as vice president, Phyllis will continue to advise animal-shelter personnel and local officials about animal-control management and the development of animal ordinances. She will be assisted by Lisa Morris, the division's new director of Accreditation, who will work to broaden The HSUS' program for accrediting local humane societies. Lisa gained experience in Ohio as a civil-trial attorney, a past president and executive board member of the Ottawa County Humane Society, and a counsel for The HSUS and The Champaign County Humane Association, where she handled a successful lawsuit against dog bunchers.

As we begin 1983 with this good news, we look forward to a highly successful year.